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(54) **ELECTRONIC STILL CAMERA WITH CAPABILITY TO PERFORM OPTIMAL FOCUS DETECTION ACCORDING TO SELECTED MODE**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An electronic still camera includes a finder optical system for viewing a subject image. An imaging section obtains the subject image. A display section displays the subject image based on image data associated with the subject image obtained by the imaging section. A mode selecting section selects either a first mode in which the electronic still camera performs imaging operation using the imaging section while a user views the subject image through the finder optical system or a second mode in which the electronic still camera performs imaging operation using the imaging section while the user views the subject image on the display section. A first focus detection circuit performs a first focus detecting operation when the first mode is selected by the mode selecting section. A second focus detection circuit performs a second focus detecting operation when the second mode is selected by the mode selecting section.

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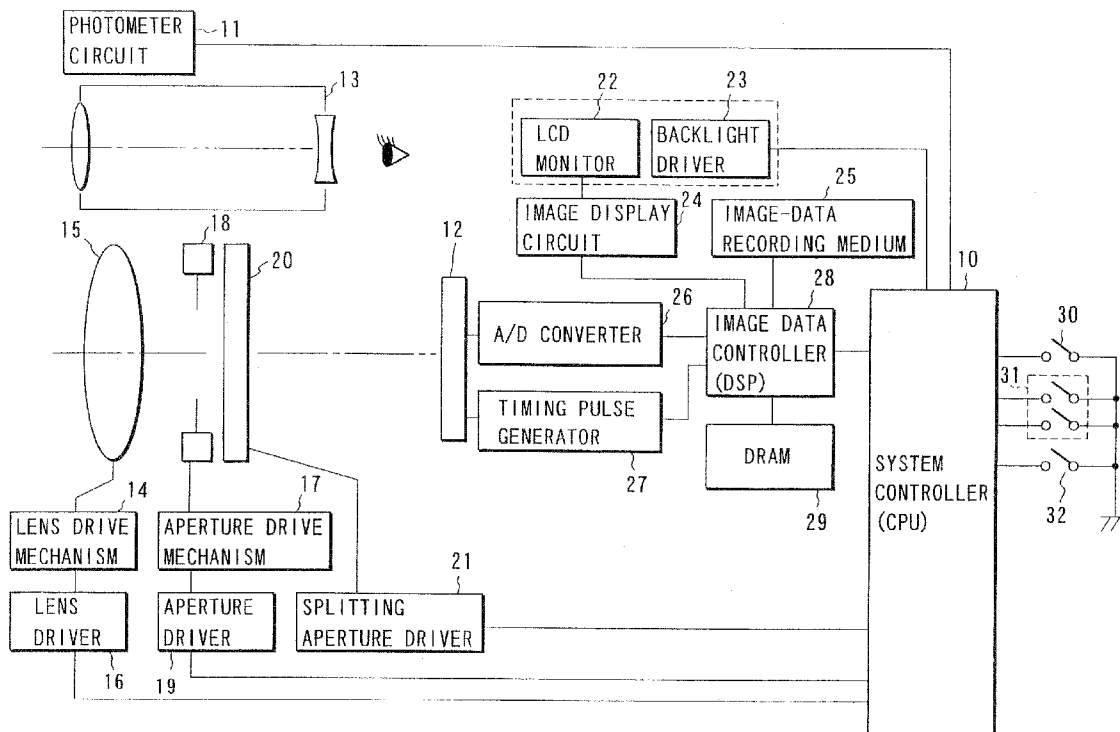
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(62) Division of application No. 11/073,100, filed on Mar. 3, 2005, which is a division of application No. 09/570,597, filed on May 12, 2000, now Pat. No. 6,882,369.



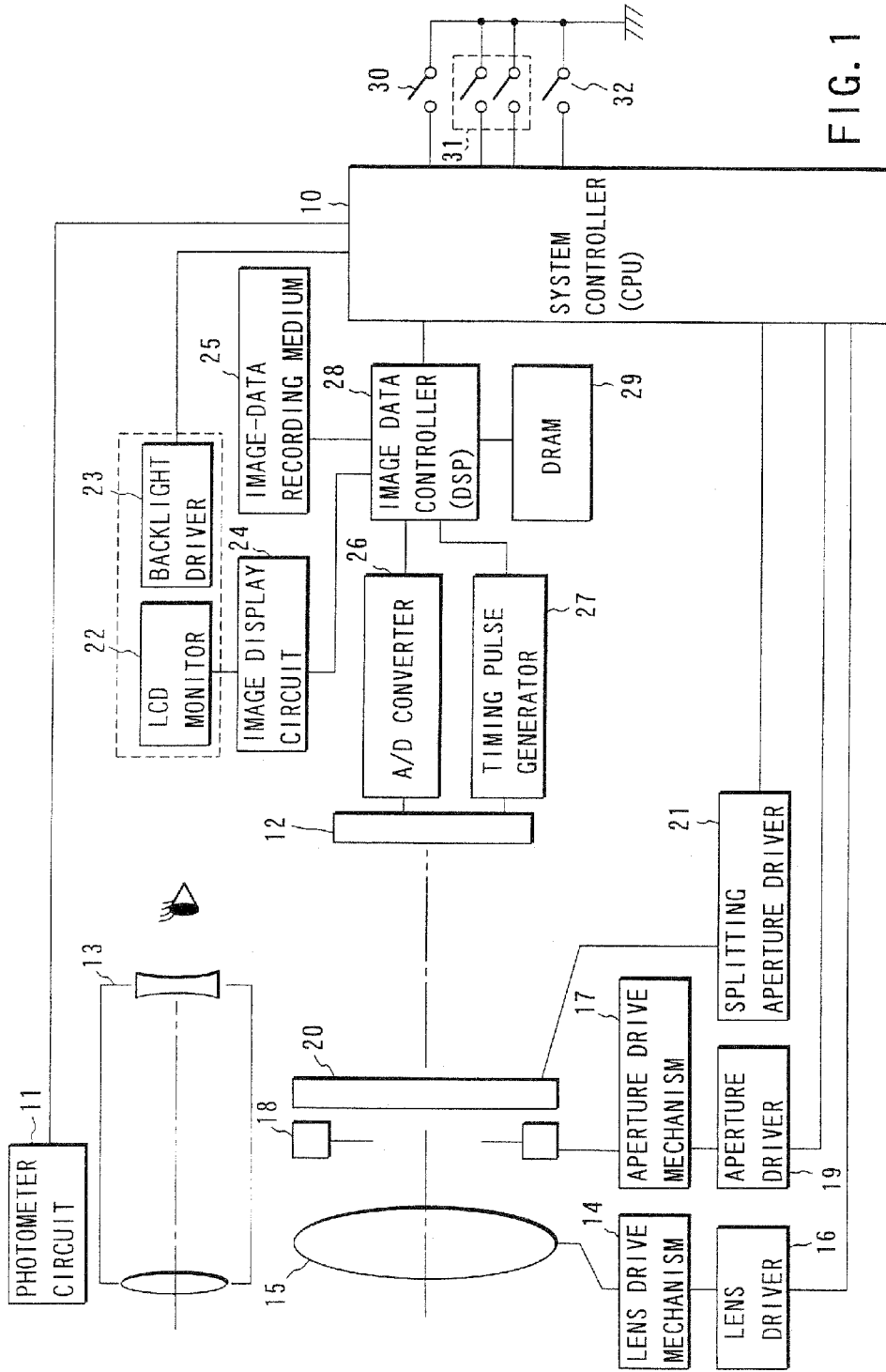
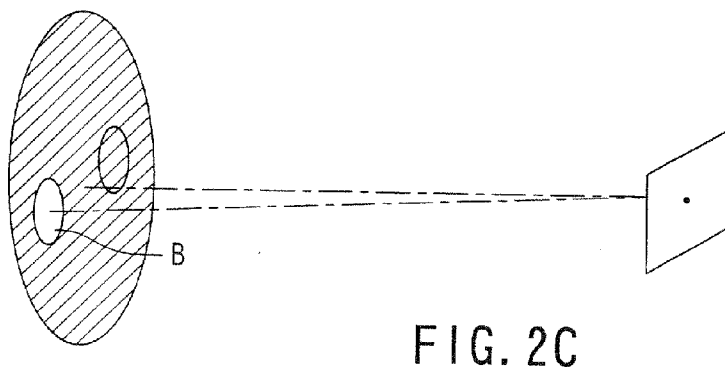
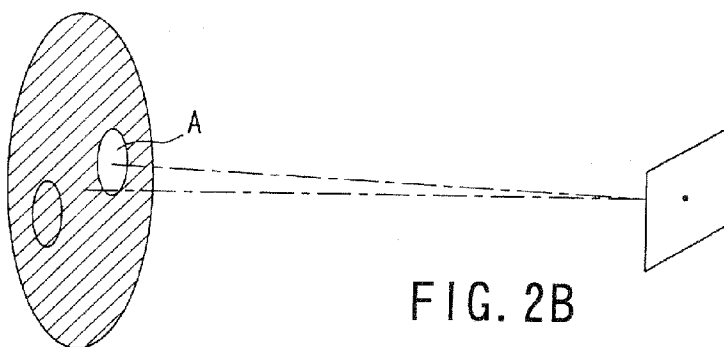
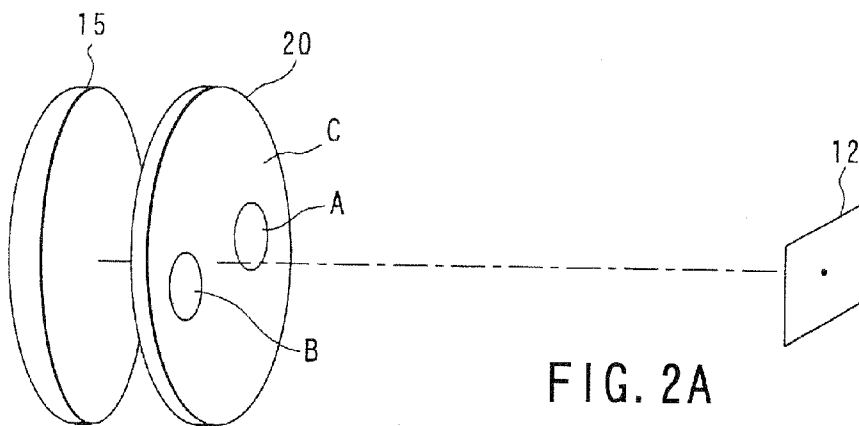


FIG. 1



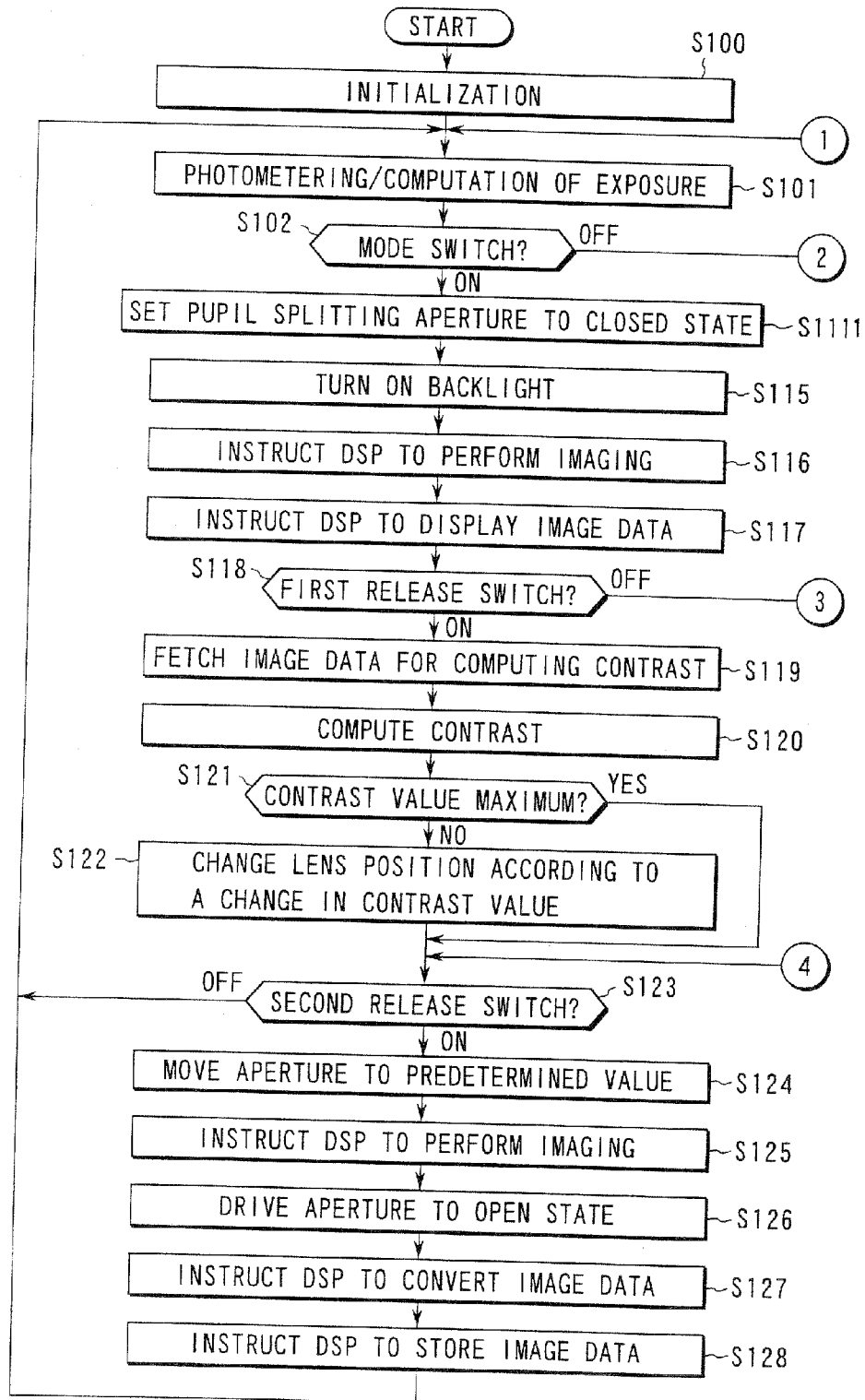


FIG. 3A

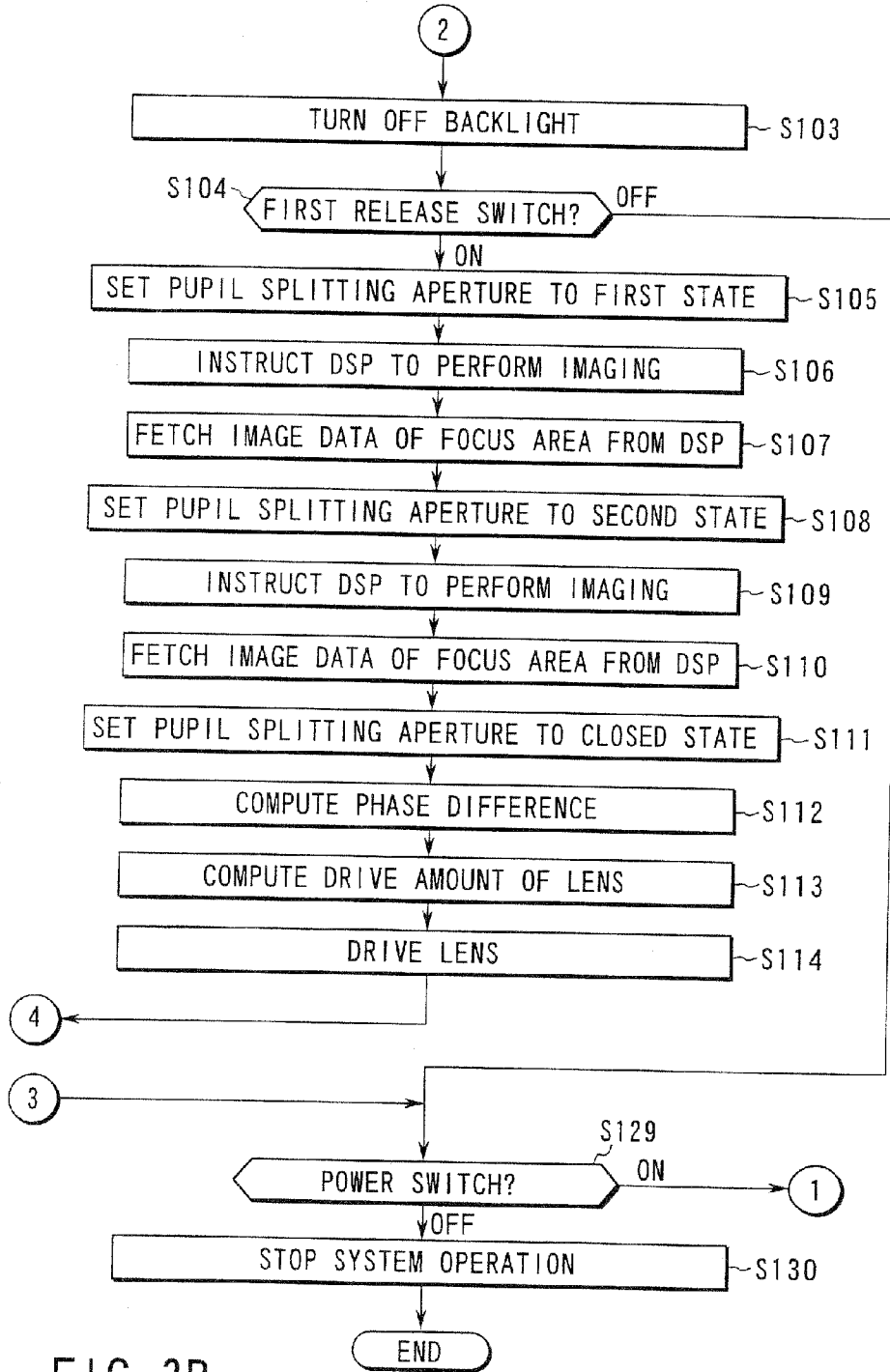


FIG. 3B

FIG. 4A

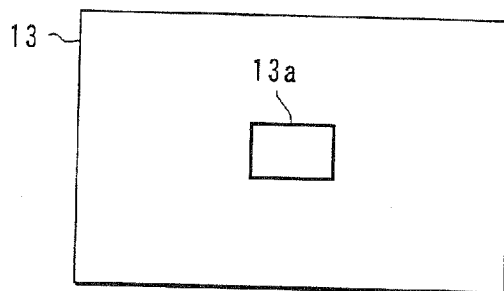


FIG. 4B

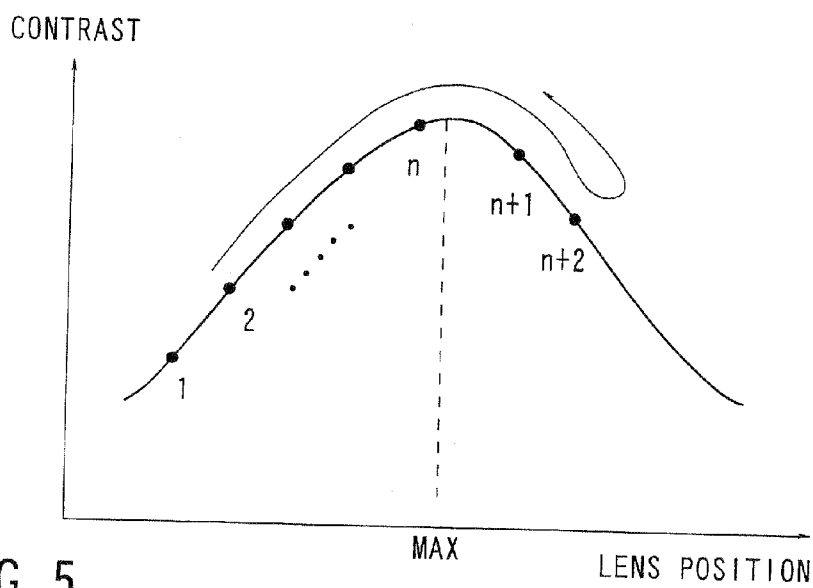
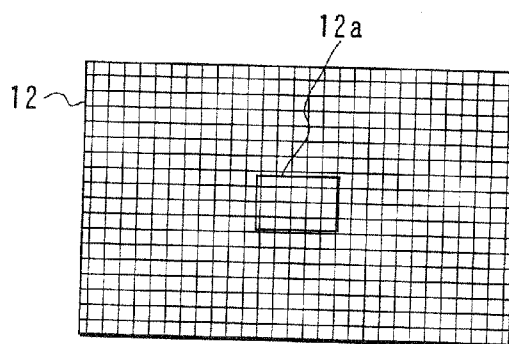


FIG. 5

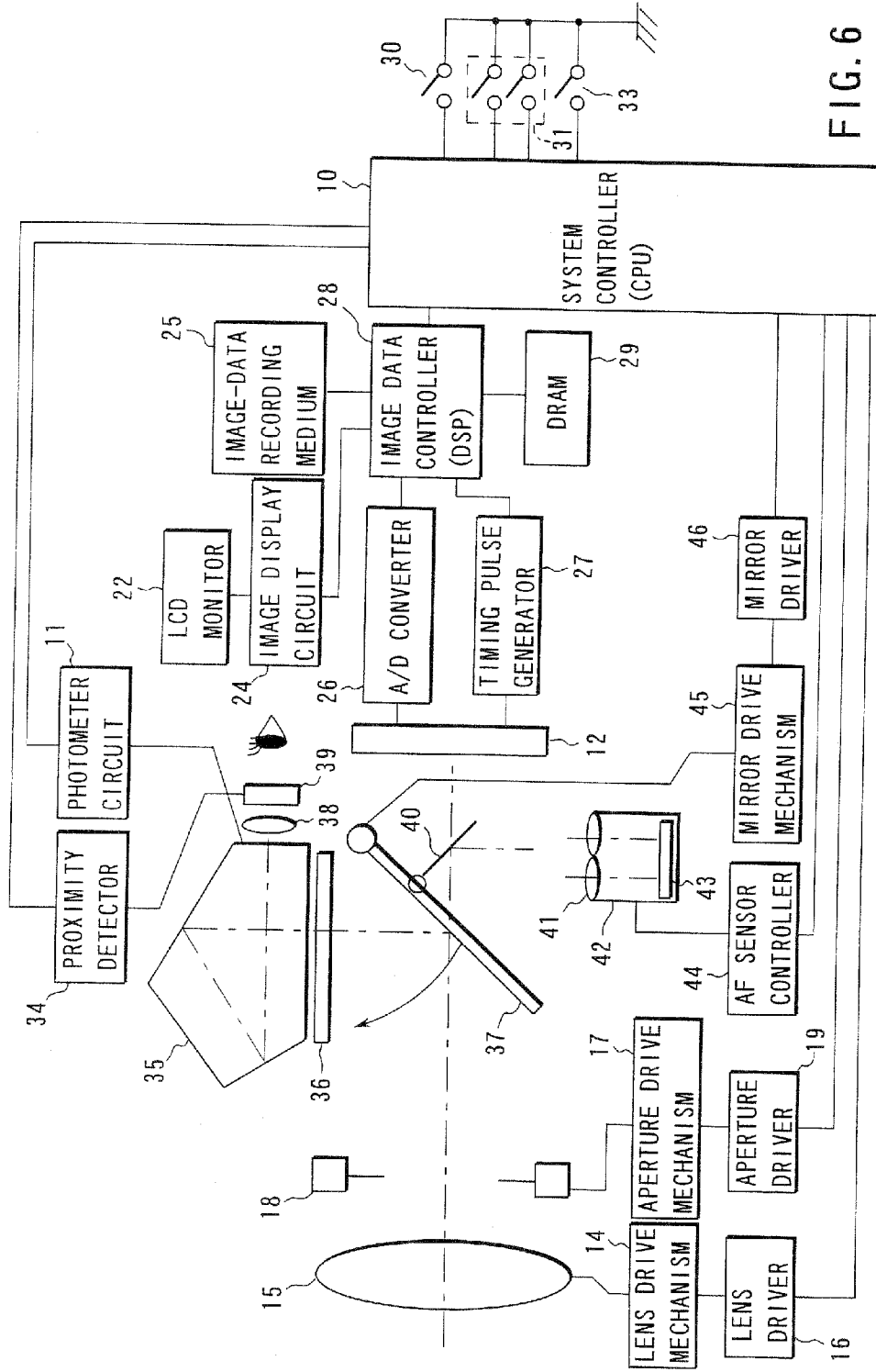


FIG. 6

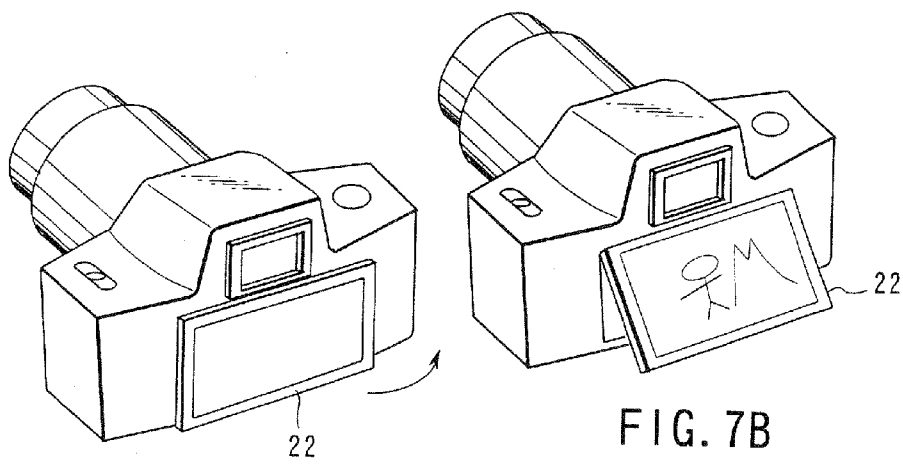


FIG. 7A

FIG. 7B

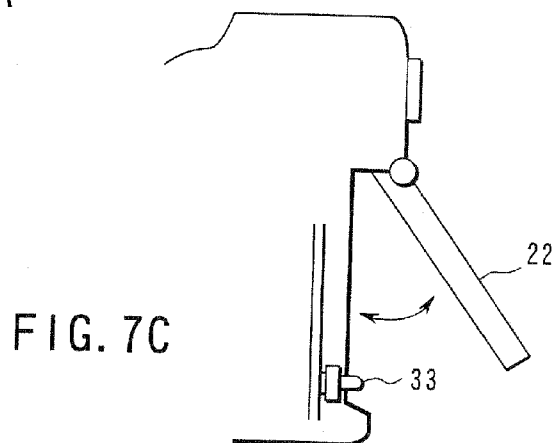


FIG. 7C

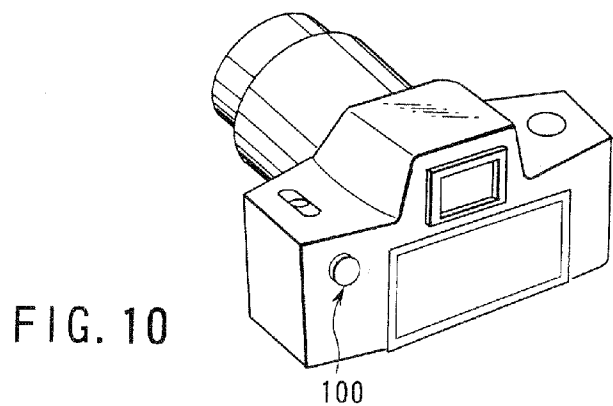


FIG. 10

100

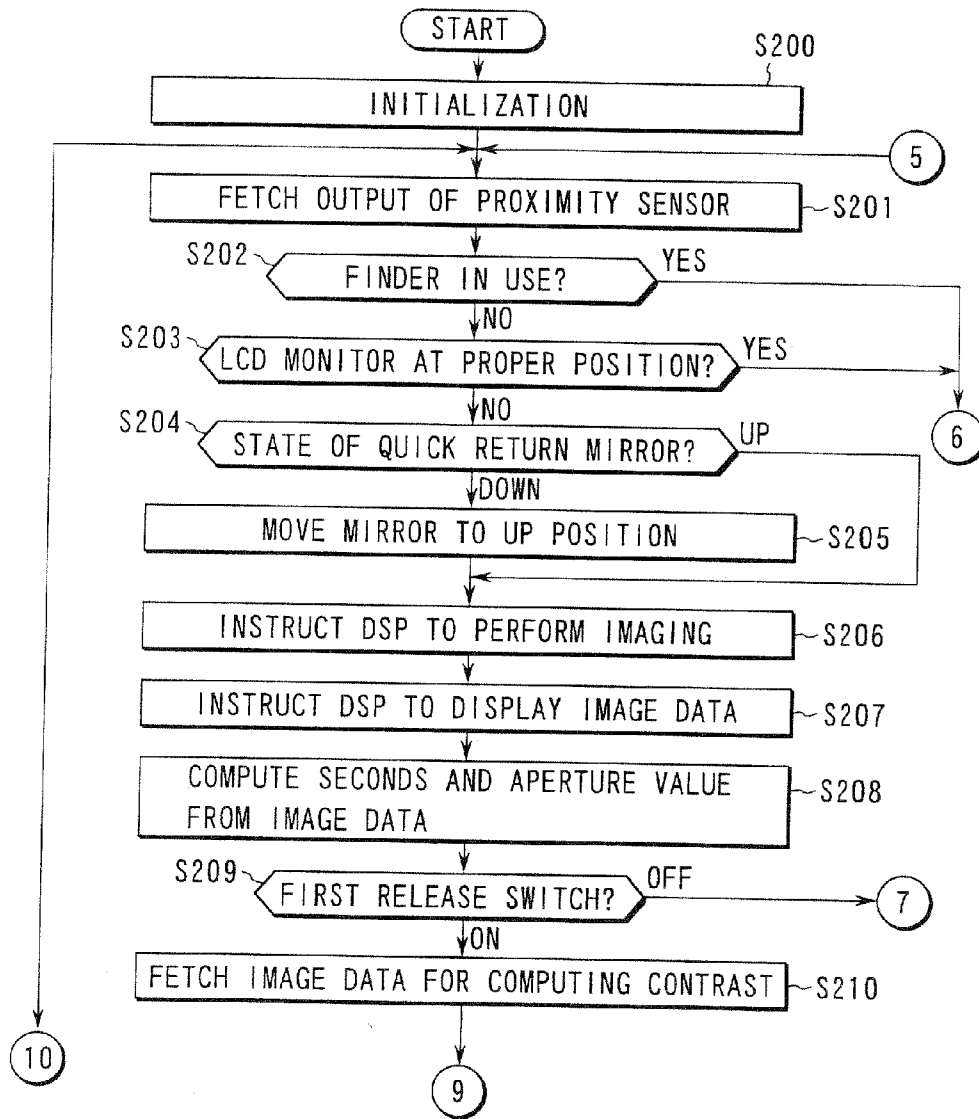


FIG. 8A

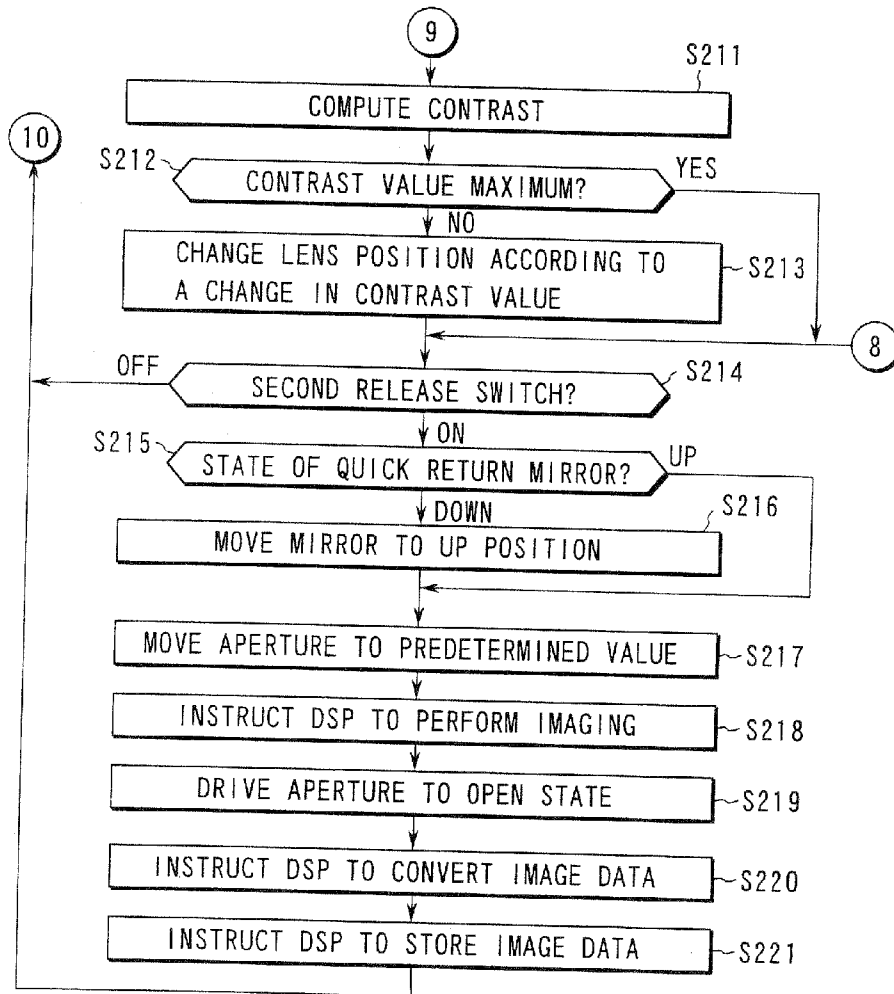


FIG. 8B

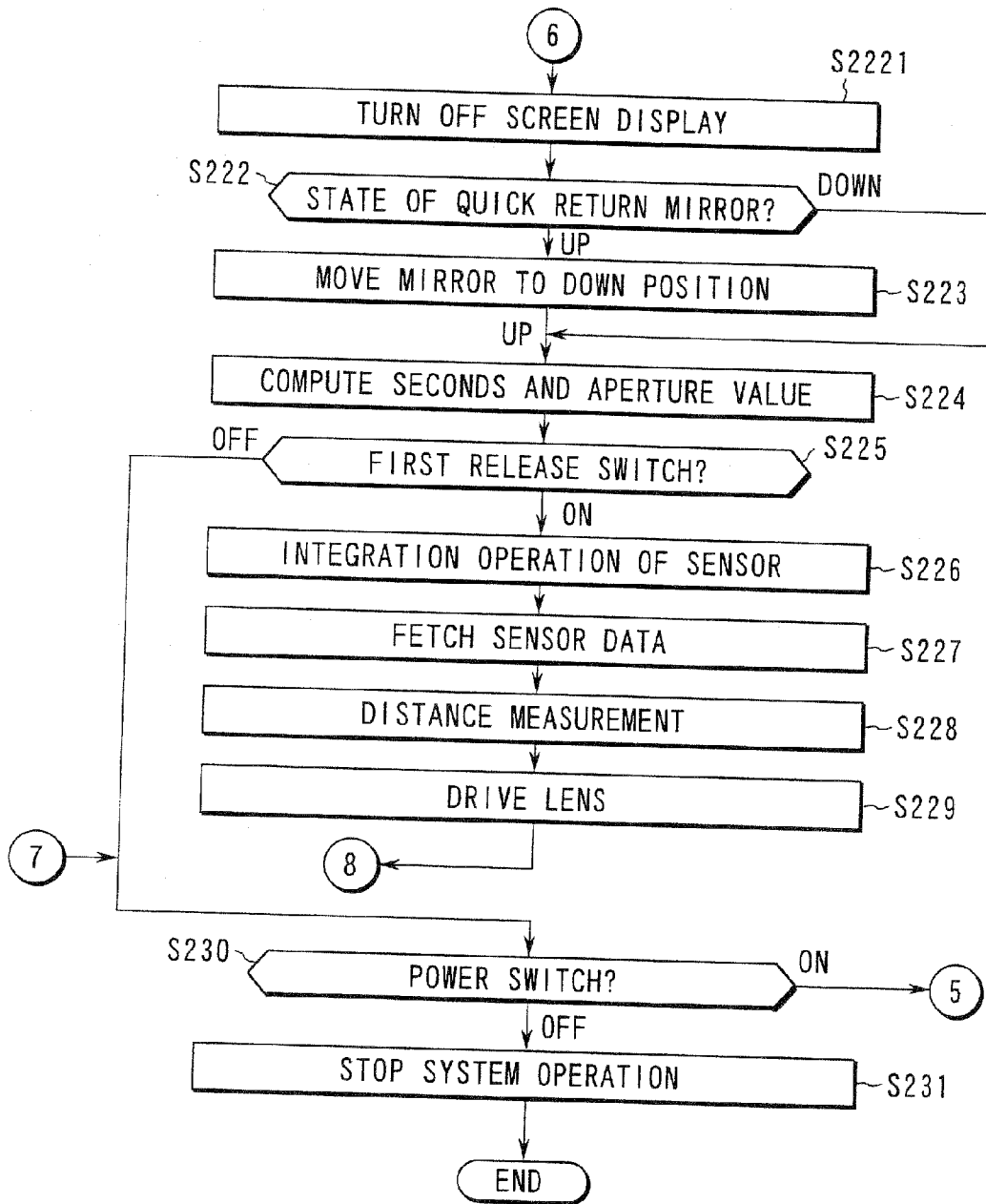


FIG. 8C

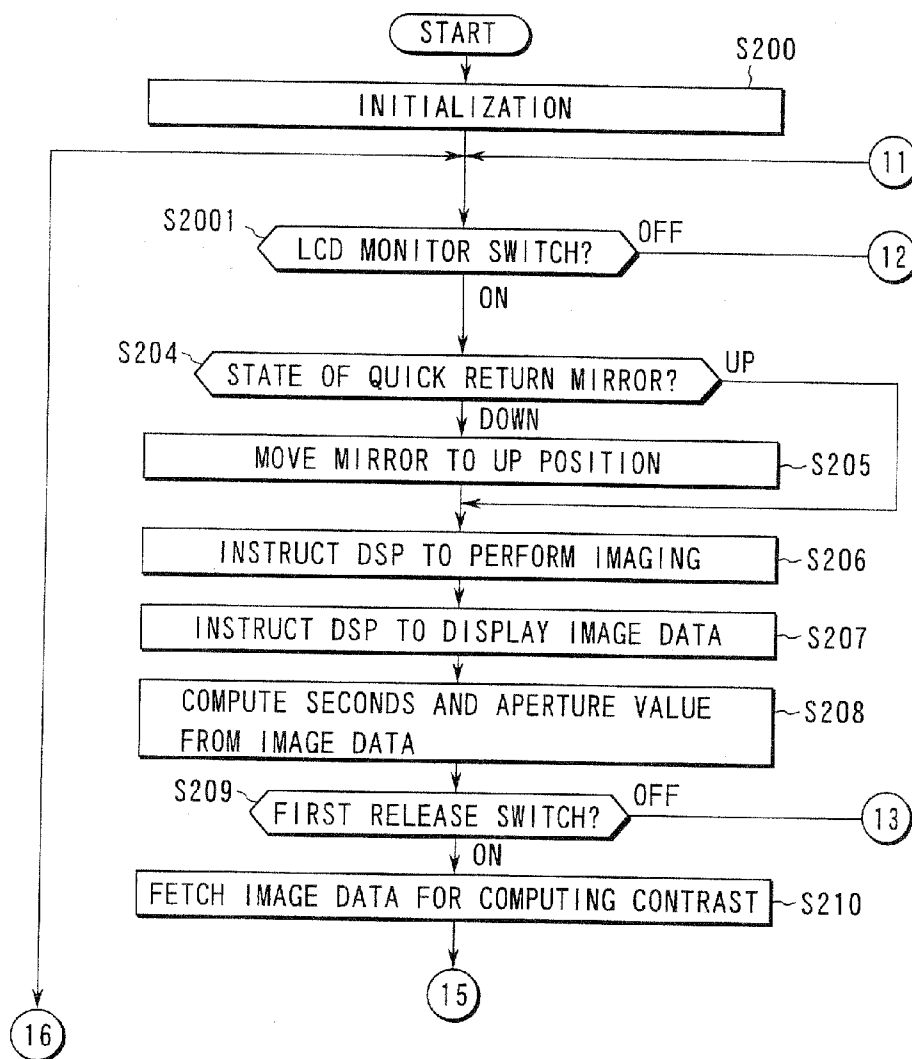


FIG. 9A

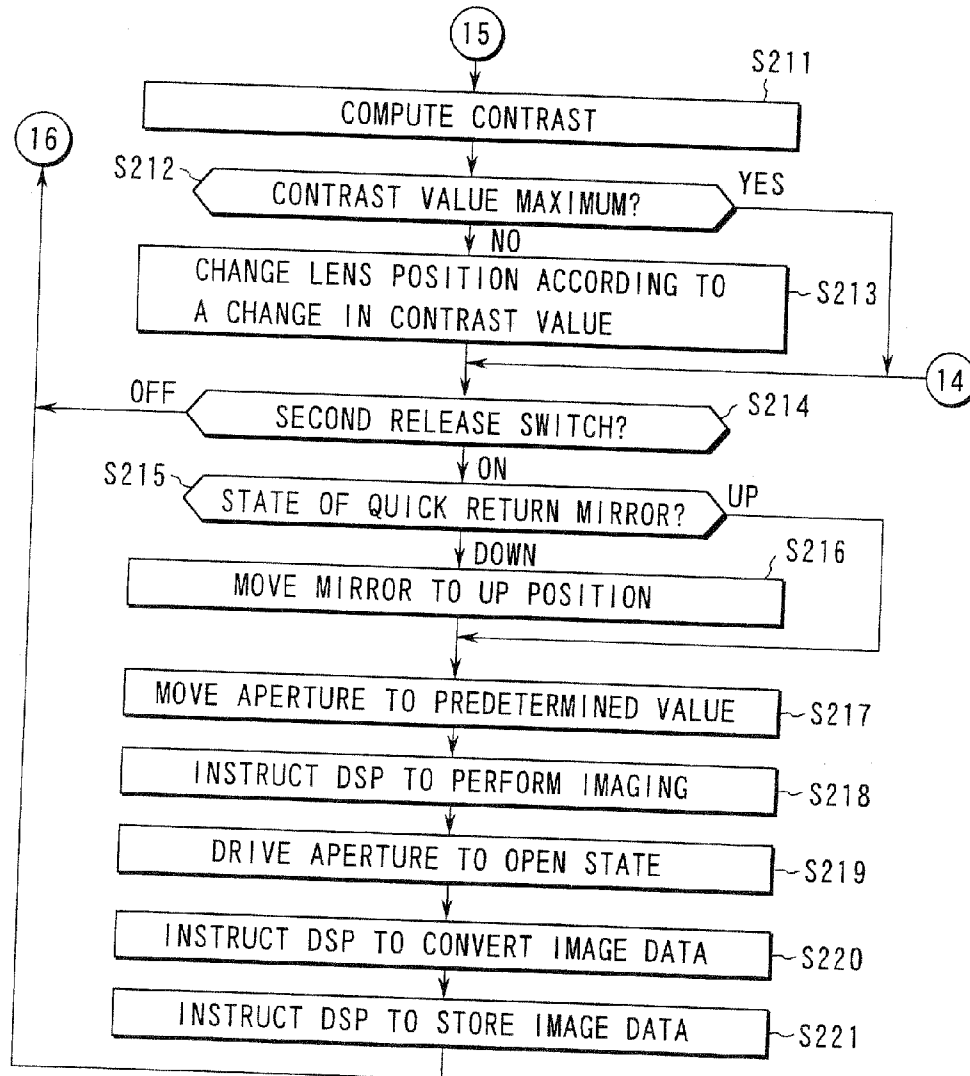


FIG. 9B

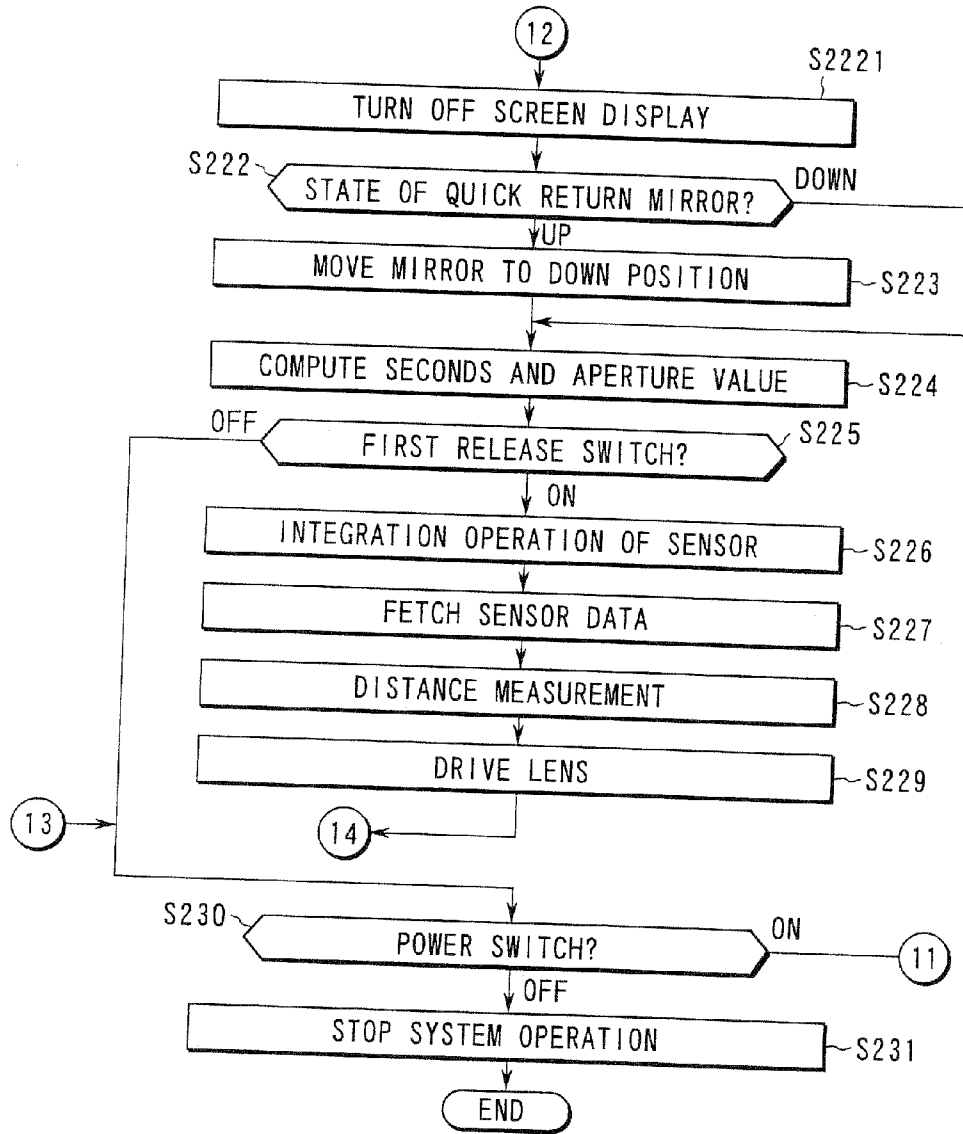


FIG. 9C

ELECTRONIC STILL CAMERA WITH CAPABILITY TO PERFORM OPTIMAL FOCUS DETECTION ACCORDING TO SELECTED MODE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application is a Divisional application of U.S. application Ser. No. 11/073,100 filed Mar. 3, 2005 which is a Divisional Application of U.S. application Ser. No. 09/570,597 now U.S. Pat. No. 6,882,369, which is based upon and claims the benefit of priority from the prior Japanese Patent Application No. 11-138906, filed May 19, 1999, the entire contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to an electronic still camera.

[0003] Electronic still cameras often employ contrast auto focus (AF) using an imaging device. While contrast AF does not require a special optical system or sensor, it suffers a slow operation because it seeks a focus point while driving the lens.

[0004] Jpn. Pat. Appln. KOKAI Publication No. 9-181954 and Jpn. Pat. Appln. KOKAI Publication No. 10-319310 disclose the technique that acquires image data by alternately moving apertures for splitting the pupil (a pair of pupil apertures) disposed in the optical path and computes the amount of defocus from image data obtained through the two actions in order to execute phase difference AF using the CCD of an imaging device. As this scheme can accomplish phase difference AF using an imaging device, the AF operation becomes faster.

[0005] Another type of electronic still camera that has a similar structure to that of a single-lens reflex camera which uses a silver film has also been put to a practical use.

[0006] General electronic still cameras have an LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) monitor and can display a picked-up image on this monitor in real time. A user may decide a composition using this monitor before taking a picture. When an AF operation is carried out using the scheme disclosed in the aforementioned prior arts, the presence of the apertures in the optical path prevent any display being made on the monitor during the AF operation.

[0007] A single-lens reflex type electronic still camera executes a focus detecting operation by guiding rays of light to a phase difference AF sensor via a quick return mirror, sub mirror and so forth placed on the optical axis of the imaging lens. Because the quick return mirror and sub mirror are located between the imaging device and the imaging lens, however, an image obtained by other operations than an imaging operation cannot be displayed on the LCD monitor.

[0008] Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide an electronic still camera that has no image display break on the monitor screen while maintaining a fast AF operation which is ensured by the use of phase difference AF.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] To achieve the above object, according to the first aspect of this invention, there is provided an electronic still camera comprising:

[0010] a finder optical system for viewing a subject image;

[0011] an imaging section for obtaining the subject image;

[0012] a display section for displaying the subject image based on image data associated with the subject image obtained by the imaging section;

[0013] a mode selecting section for selecting either a first mode in which the electronic still camera performs imaging operation using the imaging section while a user views the subject image through the finder optical system or a second mode in which the electronic still camera performs imaging operation using the imaging section while the user views the subject image on the display section;

[0014] a first focus detection circuit for carrying out a first focus detecting operation when the first mode is selected by the mode selecting section; and

[0015] a second focus detection circuit for carrying out a second focus detecting operation when the second mode is selected by the mode selecting section.

[0016] According to the second aspect of this invention, there is provided an electronic still camera equipped with a finder optical system and an imaging optical system independent of each other, which comprises:

[0017] a pupil splitting aperture, provided in an optical path of the imaging optical system, for splitting a subject image into a plurality of images;

[0018] an imaging section for obtaining the subject image;

[0019] a display section for displaying the subject image based on image data associated with the subject image obtained by the imaging section;

[0020] a mode selecting section for selecting either a first mode in which the electronic still camera performs imaging operation using the imaging section while a user views the subject image through the finder optical system or a second mode in which the electronic still camera performs imaging operation using the imaging section while the user views the subject image on the display section;

[0021] a first focus detection circuit for carrying out a first focus detecting operation by using the pupil splitting aperture when the first mode is selected by the mode selecting section; and

[0022] a second focus detection circuit for carrying out a second focus detecting operation without using the pupil splitting aperture when the second mode is selected by the mode selecting section.

[0023] According to the third aspect of this invention, there is provided an electronic still camera of a single-lens reflex type that causes a subject image having passed an imaging optical system to be reflected by a reflection member and guided to a finder optical system, which camera comprises:

[0024] a drive circuit for moving the reflection member to a first state positioned in an optical path of the imaging optical system and a second state positioned outside the optical path of the imaging optical system;

[0025] an imaging section for obtaining the subject image;

[0026] a display section for displaying the subject image based on image data associated with the subject image obtained by the imaging section;

[0027] a mode selecting section for selecting either a first mode in which the electronic still camera performs imaging operation using the imaging section while a user views the subject image through the finder optical system or a second mode in which the electronic still camera performs imaging operation using the imaging section while the user views the subject image on the display section;

[0028] a first focus detection circuit for carrying out a first focus detecting operation when the first mode is selected by the mode selecting section; and

[0029] a second focus detection circuit for carrying out a second focus detecting operation when the second mode is selected by the mode selecting section.

[0030] According to the fourth aspect of this invention, there is provided a focus detection method for an electronic still camera of a single-lens reflex type, which comprises:

[0031] a first focus detection step of carrying out auto focus based on a computation of a phase difference upon selection of a first mode in which the electronic still camera performs imaging operation using an imaging section while a user views a subject image through a finder optical system; and

[0032] a second focus detection step of carrying out contrast-computation based auto focus upon selection of a second mode in which the electronic still camera performs imaging operation using the imaging section while the user views the subject image on a liquid crystal display section.

[0033] According to the fifth aspect of this invention, there is provided a monitor display method for an electronic still camera of a single-lens reflex type, which comprises:

[0034] a mode selecting step of selecting either a first mode in which the electronic still camera performs an auto focus operation based on a computation of a phase difference and performs imaging operation using an imaging section while a user views a subject image through a finder optical system or a second mode in which the electronic still camera performs an auto focus operation based on a contrast computation and performs imaging operation using the imaging section while the user views the subject image on a display section;

[0035] a non-display step of making no monitor display when the first mode is selected by the mode selecting step; and

[0036] a display step of making a monitor display based on image data associated with the subject image obtained by the imaging section, when the second mode is selected by the mode selecting step.

[0037] Additional objects and advantages of the invention will be set forth in the description which follows, and in part will be obvious from the description, or may be learned by practice of the invention. The objects and advantages of the invention may be realized and obtained by means of the instrumentalities and combinations particularly pointed out hereinafter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING

[0038] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of the specification, illustrate presently preferred embodiments of the invention, and together with the general description given above and the detailed description of the preferred embodiments given below, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

[0039] FIG. 1 is a block structural diagram of an electronic still camera according to a first embodiment of this invention;

[0040] FIG. 2A is a diagram showing the structure of a pupil splitting aperture 20 and a positional relationship among this aperture and an imaging lens 15 and an imaging device 12, and FIGS. 2B and 2C are diagrams for explaining a scheme for focus detection;

[0041] FIGS. 3A and 3B are flowcharts for explaining the operation of a CPU 10 in the first embodiment of this invention;

[0042] FIG. 4A shows a focus area 13a of a finder 13 and

[0043] FIG. 4B is a diagram showing an area 12a on the imaging device 12 corresponding to the focus area 13a;

[0044] FIG. 5 is a diagram depicting a positional relationship between the lens position and contrast;

[0045] FIG. 6 is a block structural diagram of a camera according to a second embodiment of this invention;

[0046] FIG. 7A shows an LCD monitor 22 at the normal position, FIG. 7B shows the LCD monitor 22 tilted, and FIG. 7C is a diagram for explaining the ON and OFF operations of an LCD-monitor-position detecting switch 33;

[0047] FIGS. 5A, 8B and 8C are flowcharts for explaining the operation of a CPU 10 in a second embodiment of this invention;

[0048] FIGS. 9A, 9B and 9C are flowcharts for explaining the operation of a CPU 10 in a third embodiment of this invention; and

[0049] FIG. 10 is an external perspective view showing the appearance of a camera equipped with an LCD-monitor switch.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0050] Preferred embodiments of the present invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

FIRST EMBODIMENT

[0051] FIG. 1 is a block structural diagram of an electronic still camera according to a first embodiment of this invention.

[0052] A system controller (hereinafter called "CPU") 10 performs the general control of the electronic still camera according to this embodiment. A photometer circuit 11 measures the luminance of a subject. The CPU 10 determines the set value of an aperture and the integration time of an imaging device (imaging section) 12 based on the luminance information from the photometer circuit 11. A

finder **13** is used to check an imaging area. A lens drive mechanism **14** has an actuator such as a motor and converts the drive force of this actuator to the motion of an imaging lens **15** on the optical axis. Power is supplied to the actuator from a lens driver **16**. The CPU **10** can arbitrarily set the position of the imaging lens **15** by controlling the lens driver **16**. An aperture drive mechanism **17** has an actuator such as a step motor and drives blades which constitutes an aperture **18**. Power is supplied to this actuator from an aperture driver **19**. The CPU **10** can arbitrarily set the position of the aperture **18** by controlling this aperture driver **19**.

[0053] A pupil splitting aperture **20** is positioned in the vicinity of the aperture **18**. Focus detection using the imaging device **12** can be accomplished by controlling this pupil splitting aperture **20**. The principle of the focus detection is disclosed in, for example, Jpn. Pat. Appln. KOKAI Publication No. 9-43507. The aforementioned Jpn. Pat. Appln. KOKAI Publication No. 10-319310 discloses the mechanism of a pupil splitting aperture.

[0054] According to this embodiment, the pupil splitting aperture **20** is constructed by using, for example, a liquid crystal which can electrically pass and block light. This liquid crystal is driven by a splitting aperture driver **21**.

[0055] FIG. 2A is a diagram showing the structure of the pupil splitting aperture **20** and a positional relationship among this aperture **20** and the imaging lens **15** and the imaging device **12**. As shown in this figure, the pupil splitting aperture **20** comprises three segments (A, B and C).

[0056] With this structure, focus detection is carried out as follows. First, as shown in FIG. 2B, image data obtained on the imaging device **12** by imaging operation performed with only the segment A set to pass light is fetched and stored in memory. Then, as shown in FIG. 2C, image data obtained on the imaging device **12** by imaging operation performed with the segment B alone set to pass light is fetched and stored in memory. The CPU **10** executes phase difference computation using those two pieces of image data. If the image of a subject through the imaging lens **15** is on focus on the imaging device **12**, the two pieces of image data should overlap one on the other, causing no phase difference. If the subject image is out of focus, there should be a deviation between the two pieces of image data. The amount of displacement of the imaging lens **15** is acquired by obtaining the amount of this deviation through phase difference computation.

[0057] Returning to FIG. 1, the CPU **10** is connected to an image data controller **28**. This image data controller **28** is an image correcting section which is comprised of a DSP (Digital Signal Processor). The image data controller **28** performs operations, such as correction and processing, on the input image data from the imaging device **12** based on an instruction from the CPU **10**.

[0058] The image data controller **28** is connected to a timing pulse generator **27** which outputs a pulse signal needed at the time of driving the imaging device **12**, an A/D converter **26** which receives the timing pulse generated by the timing pulse generator **27** and converts an analog signal corresponding to the subject image output from the imaging device **12** to a digital signal, and a DRAM **29** which temporarily stores the acquired image data (digital data).

[0059] An image display circuit **24** controls a liquid crystal display (LCD) monitor **22**. The image display circuit **24**

and the LCD monitor **22** constitute a display section. The image display circuit **24** displays the input image data from the imaging device **12** on the LCD monitor **22**. A backlight driver **23** controls backlight which illuminates the LCD monitor **22**. An image-data recording medium **25** is constituted by a flash memory, HDD, FDD or the like.

[0060] The CPU **10** is further connected to a power switch **30**, a release switch **31** and a mode switch **32**. The camera system is permitted to operate only when the power switch **30** is on. The release switch **31** is a two-stage switch having a first release switch and a second release switch. When the release switch **31** is half depressed, the first release switch is set on. When the release switch **31** is further depressed, both the first and second release switches are set on.

[0061] The mode switch **32** is an operation member (mode selecting section) for manually switching between an operation mode (first operation mode) for allowing a user to perform imaging operation while viewing the subject through the finder **13** and an operation mode (second operation mode) for allowing the user to perform imaging operation while viewing the subject using the LCD monitor **22**.

[0062] FIGS. 3A and 3B are flowcharts for explaining the operation of the CPU **10** in the first embodiment. When the power switch **30** is set on, power is supplied to the camera system and the CPU **10** starts operating. In step S100 first, various initializations, such as memory initialization, initialization of the I/O ports and initialization of the peripheral circuits of the CPU **10**, are carried out. In step S101, the CPU **10** receives the luminance information of the subject from the photometer circuit **11**. Based on this information, the CPU **10** computes the set value of the aperture and the integration time of the imaging device **12**. In step S102, the status of the mode switch **32** is detected. When the mode switch **32** is on, imaging operation is performed while allowing the user to view the subject using the LCD monitor **22**. In this case, the flow proceeds to step S1111 from step S102. In step S1111, the liquid crystal segments A, B and C constituting the pupil splitting aperture **20** are made transparent, and the pupil splitting aperture **20** is brought into the closed state. In step S115, the backlight of the LCD monitor **22** is turned on. In step S116, the CPU **10** instructs the DSP **28** to perform an imaging operation.

[0063] When given such an instruction, the DSP **28** fetches image data by controlling the imaging device **12**. In step S117, the CPU **10** instructs the DSP **28** to display picked-up image data. The instructed DSP **28** controls the image display circuit **24** to display the image data on the LCD monitor **22**. As the processes in steps S116 and S117 are executed cyclically, the status of the subject can be observed in real time on the LCD monitor **22**. In step S118, the status of the first release switch is detected. When the first release switch is on, the flow proceeds to step S119 to perform a focus adjusting operation. When the first release switch is off, the flow goes to step S129.

[0064] In step S129, the status of the power switch **30** is detected. If the power switch **30** is off in this step, the system operation should be stopped. The CPU **10** stops after an operation to stop the system operation is executed in step S130. If the power switch **30** is on, on the other hand, the flow goes to step S101 to continue the operation.

[0065] When the flow proceeds to step S119 from step S118, the CPU **10** receives image data for computing the

contrast from the DSP 28. This data is part of the image data that the DSP 28 has acquired from the imaging device 12. The image data for contrast computation is obtained as follows.

[0066] FIG. 4A shows a focus area 13a of the finder 13. In step S119, image data of an area 12a (FIG. 4B) on the imaging device 12 corresponding to the focus area 13a is fetched from the DSP 28. In step S120, known contrast computation is performed on this image data. In general, the difference between adjacent image data is obtained.

[0067] In step S121, it is determined if contrast data has a maximum value. To detect that contrast data has the maximum value, contrast computation should be performed while moving the imaging lens 15. FIG. 5 is a diagram depicting a positional relationship between the lens position and contrast. As apparent from this figure, when the contrast tends to increase, the imaging lens 15 is moved in the same direction as the present moving direction in step S122. When the contrast tends to decrease, the moving direction of the imaging lens 15 is reversed in step S122. When it is determined that the contrast is the maximum, it is unnecessary to move the imaging lens 15 so that the flow proceeds to step S123 from step S121. As the operation from step S119 to step S122 is periodically executed, the subject is brought into focus.

[0068] In step S123, the status of the second release switch is detected. When this release switch is off, the flow returns to step S101, whereas when the release switch is on, the flow goes to step S124. In step S124, the aperture 18 is driven to the position of the aperture value determined in step S101. In step S125, the DSP 28 is instructed to perform an imaging operation with the integration time determined in step S101.

[0069] The DSP 28 fetches image data by controlling the imaging device 12 and stores the image data in the DRAM 29. In step S126, the aperture 18 is driven to the release state. In step S127, the DSP 28 is instructed to convert the fetched image data (e.g., conversion to the JPEG format). In step S128, the DSP 28 is instructed to store the converted image data into the image-data recording medium 25. Then, the flow returns to step S101.

[0070] When the mode switch 32 is off in step S102, the flow proceeds to step S103 from step S102. The OFF state of the mode switch 32 indicates the selection of the operation mode that allows the camera to carry out imaging operation while a user views the subject through the finder 13. In step S103, the backlight is turned off to disable the display of the LCD monitor 22. In step S104, the status of the first release switch is detected. When the first release switch is on, the flow proceeds to step S105 to execute a focus detecting operation. When the first release switch is off, on the other hand, the flow proceeds to step S123 to detect the status of the power switch 30.

[0071] In step S105, the pupil splitting aperture 20 is set to the first state that is shown in FIG. 2B. In step S106, the DSP 28 is instructed to perform an imaging operation. In step S107, data (12a in FIG. 4B) equivalent to the focus area 13a is acquired from the image data that the DSP 28 has acquired from the imaging device 12. This data is stored in the internal memory of the CPU 10. In step S108, the pupil splitting aperture 20 is set to the second state corresponding to the one shown in FIG. 2C.

[0072] In step S109, the DSP 28 is instructed to perform an imaging operation. In step S110, as in step S107, image data corresponding to the focus area 13a is acquired from the DSP 28. In step S111, the pupil splitting aperture 20 is brought into the closed state so that no problem occurs at the time of obtaining an image.

[0073] In step S112, known phase difference computation is carried out using the data fetched in step S107 and the data fetched in step S110 to thereby acquire the amount of defocus. In step S113, the amount of driving the lens is acquired from this defocus amount. In step S114, the lens is driven based on the driving amount. Then, the flow proceeds to step S123.

[0074] In the above-described first embodiment, one of two operation states is selected by the mode switch. As an alternative way, the operation state may be automatically selected based on the result of focus detection. Further, contrast AF may be performed first, and if the contrast AF is not feasible, auto focus may be switched to the phase-difference type AF.

SECOND EMBODIMENT

[0075] FIG. 6 is a block structural diagram of a camera according to the second embodiment of this invention. The electronic still camera according to the above-described first embodiment is equipped with the finder optical system and the imaging optical system independent of each other. According to the second embodiment, however, this invention is adapted to an electronic still camera of a single-lens reflex type. For the same components as those of the first embodiment, their descriptions will not be repeated.

[0076] When a quick return mirror 37 is down, the subject image is formed on a focusing screen 36 by the imaging lens 15. The image on the focusing screen 36 is guided to an eyepiece 38 via a pentaprism 35. A proximity sensor 39 is provided in the vicinity of the eyepiece 38. The proximity sensor 39, for which, for example, a photo reflector or the like can be used, detects if the user's eye is close to the eyepiece 38 (if the user is optically seeing the subject). The output of the proximity sensor 39 is processed by a proximity detector 34 and is then sent to the CPU 10.

[0077] The photometer circuit 11, located in the vicinity of the eyepiece 38, measures the luminance of the subject from the subject image on the focusing screen 36. The quick return mirror 37 is driven to an up position and down position by a mirror drive mechanism 45. The mirror drive mechanism 45 includes an actuator such as a motor to which drive power is supplied from a mirror driver 46. The center portion of the quick return mirror 17 is a half mirror. The light that passes the half mirror is led to a focus detection module 42 by a sub mirror 40.

[0078] The focus detection module 42 comprises a separator lens 41 and a line sensor 43. As the separator lens 41 detects the relative distance between two subjects formed on the line sensor 43, the amount of displacement of the imaging lens 15 can be acquired. The line sensor 43 is controlled by an AF sensor controller 44. The power switch and release switch 31, which are connected to the CPU 10, have the same functions as those of the first embodiment. An LCD-monitor position detecting switch 33 changes its ON and OFF states according to the position of the LCD monitor 22.

[0079] FIGS. 7A and 7B give an aerial rear view of a camera system according to this embodiment. FIG. 7A shows the LCD monitor 22 at the normal position, and FIG. 7B shows the LCD monitor 22 tilted. In the state of FIG. 7A, the LCD-monitor-position detecting switch 33 shown in FIG. 7C is off. When the LCD monitor 22 is tilted as shown in FIG. 7B, the LCD-monitor-position detecting switch 33 protracts and becomes on. At this time, image data fetched from the imaging device 12 is displayed on the LCD monitor 22. The camera can obtain an image while a user views the subject displayed on the LCD monitor 22.

[0080] FIGS. 8A, 8B and 8C are flowcharts for explaining the operation of the CPU 10 in the second embodiment. When the power switch 30 is set on, the CPU 10 starts operating. In first step S200, the system is initialized as done in step S100. In step S201, the output of the proximity sensor 39 is input to the CPU 10 via the proximity detector 34. In step S202, the use state of the finder, i.e., whether or not the user is looking through the finder is determined based on the output of the proximity sensor 39. If the user is looking through the finder, the flow proceeds to step S221 from step S202, and if the user is not, the flow proceeds to step S203. In step S203, the use state of the LCD monitor is determined from the status of the LCD-monitor-position detecting switch 33. It is determined here if the LCD monitor 22 is at the proper position. If the LCD monitor 22 is at the proper position as shown in FIG. 7A, the flow proceeds to step S2221 from step S203. If the LCD monitor 22 is not at the proper position and is tilted as shown in FIG. 7B, the flow proceeds to step S204.

[0081] If the processes of steps S201 to S203 indicate that the user is using the finder or the LCD monitor 22 is at the proper position, it is determined that the camera is in the operation mode to carry out imaging operation while the user views the subject through the finder. Then, the sequence of processes after step S2221 is executed. If the user is not using the finder and the LCD monitor 22 is not at the proper position, it is determined that the camera is in the operation mode to carry out imaging operation while the user views the subject using the LCD monitor 22. Then, the sequence of processes after step S204 is executed.

[0082] In step S204, the status of the quick return mirror 37 is detected. When this mirror 37 is at the down position, it is not possible to fetch image data from the imaging device 12. If the quick return mirror is at the down position, therefore, the mirror 37 is driven to the up position in step S205.

[0083] In steps S206 and S207, the same operations as done in steps S116 and S117 are performed so that the subject can be seen on the LCD monitor 22. In step S208, the shutter seconds and the aperture value are determined based on the output of the imaging device 12. As the quick return mirror 37 is up now, the shutter seconds and the aperture value cannot be determined based on the output of the photometer circuit 11. In step S209, the status of the first release switch is detected. If the first release switch is off, the flow proceeds to step S230 from step S209. If the first release switch is on, the flow goes to step S210 from step S209. The operation of steps S210 to S213 is a contrast AF operation using the output of the imaging device 12, the same as the operation of steps S119 to S122. In step S214, the status of the second release switch is detected. If the

second release switch is off, the flow returns to step S201, and if it is on, the flow goes to step S215. In step S215, the status of the quick return mirror 37 is detected. If this mirror 37 is at the down position, the mirror 37 is driven to the up position in step S216.

[0084] The operation of steps S217 to S221 is the same as the operation of steps S124 to S128. When the flow goes to step S2221 from step S202 or step S203, the CPU 10 instructs the DSP 28 to turn off the screen display on the LCD monitor 22.

[0085] In step S222, the status of the quick return mirror 37 is detected. If this mirror 37 is up, the subject cannot be seen through the finder. In this case, the mirror 37 is driven to the down position in step S223.

[0086] In step S224, the shutter seconds and the aperture value are computed based on the output of the photometer circuit 11. In step S225, the status of the first release switch is detected. If the first release switch is off, the flow proceeds to step S230, and if it is on, the flow proceeds to step S226. In step S226, the CPU 10 instructs the AF sensor controller 44 to perform an integration operation of the line sensor 43. The AF sensor controller 44 permits the integration operation of the line sensor 43 for the time that corresponds to the luminance of the subject. When the integration is completed, the CPU 10 converts the output of the line sensor 43 into digital data which is in turn sent to the CPU 10.

[0087] In step S227, this digital data is read. In step S228, known phase difference computation is performed on this data to acquire the amount of defocus. Based on the defocus amount, the amount of displacement of the imaging lens 15 is obtained. In step S229, the imaging lens 15 is driven based on this displacement amount. Then, the flow proceeds to step S214 to detect the status of the second release switch. When the flow proceeds to step S230 from step S209 or step S225, the status of the power switch 30 is detected. If this power switch 30 is on, the flow proceeds to step S201 to continue the operation. If the power switch 30 is off, a process of stopping the system is performed in step S231 and the CPU 10 stops operating.

[0088] According to this embodiment, as described above, the phase-difference based AF operation is performed in the operation mode to obtain an image while allowing the user to directly see the subject through the finder, and the contrast-detection based AF operation using image data from the imaging device is performed in the operation mode to obtain an image while allowing the user to directly see the subject through the LCD monitor on which the output of the imaging device is displayed. It is therefore possible to provide an electronic still camera that has no image display break on the monitor screen while maintaining a fast AF operation which is ensured by the use of phase difference AF.

[0089] According to both the first and second embodiments, the phase-difference based AF is employed in the operation mode to obtain an image using the finder and the contrast-detection based AF is employed in the operation mode to obtain an image using the monitor. This invention is in no way restrictive to those two AF systems.

THIRD EMBODIMENT

[0090] FIGS. 9A, 9B and 9C are flowcharts for explaining the operation of the CPU 10 according to the third embodi-

ment of this invention. This flow is characterized by removing the proximity sensor for detecting if the finder is in use and the LCD-monitor position detecting switch and providing an LCD monitor switch 100 as shown in FIG. 10 instead.

[0091] The following will discuss only what differs from the flowcharts in FIGS. 8A, 8B and 8C. After initialization is carried out in step S200, the flow goes to step S2001 to determine if the LCD monitor switch 100 is on. If the LCD monitor switch 100 is on, the status of the quick return mirror is then determined in step S204. If the quick return mirror is at the down position, the mirror is driven to the up position and a through screen is displayed on the LCD monitor (step S205). In macro photographing, the user can take a picture while viewing the subject on the LCD monitor in this state. If it is determined in step S2001 that the LCD monitor switch 100 is off, the flow proceeds to step S221 to turn off the screen.

[0092] As apparent from the above, this invention can provide an electronic still camera that has no image display break on the monitor screen while maintaining a fast AF operation which is ensured by the use of phase difference AF.

[0093] Additional advantages and modifications will readily occur to those skilled in the art. Therefore, the invention in its broader aspects is not limited to the specific details and representative embodiments shown and described herein. Accordingly, various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit or scope of the general inventive concept as defined by the appended claims and their equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. An electronic camera of a single-lens reflex type comprising:

a quick return mirror which moves to a first position, which is located in an optical path of an imaging lens and guides an imaging light flux which has passed through the imaging lens to a finder optical system, and a second position which is located outside the optical path of the imaging lens and guides the imaging light flux to an imaging element;

a monitor which is provided on a back surface of a camera body and displays a subject image captured by the imaging element; and

a mode switching means which switches between a first operation mode that positions the quick return mirror at the first position, so as to start an imaging operation of the subject image in a visible state, and a second operation mode that positions the quick return mirror at the second position, so as to start the imaging operation of the subject image captured by the imaging element in a state where the subject image is being displayed on the monitor;

wherein when the mode is switched to the first operation mode by the mode switching means, the monitor is controlled so as to be in an off-state and when the mode is switched to the second operation mode by the mode

switching means, the quick return mirror is forcibly placed at the second position, and the monitor is controlled so as to be in an on-state, whereby starting the display of the subject image captured by the imaging element.

2. The electronic camera of a single-lens reflex type according to claim 1, further comprising a means for performing an AF operation using an output of the imaging element, including a contrast AF means and a phase difference AF means,

wherein a first focus detecting operation is performed using the phase difference AF means when the mode is switched to the first operation mode by the mode switching means, and a second focus detecting operation is performed using the contrast AF means when the mode is switched to the second operation mode by the mode switching means.

3. The electronic camera of a single-lens reflex type according to claim 1, further comprising a first judging means which judges whether a user is seeing through a finder,

wherein when it is judged that the user is seeing through the finder, the mode is switched to the first operation mode by the mode switching means, and when it is judged that the user is not seeing through the finder, the mode is switched to the second operation mode by the mode switching means.

4. The electronic camera of a single-lens reflex type according to claim 1, further comprising a second judging means which judges whether the monitor is arranged at a normal position with respect to the camera body,

wherein when it is judged that the monitor is arranged at the normal position with respect to the camera body, the mode is switched to the second operation mode by the mode switching means, and when it is judged that the monitor is not arranged at the normal position with respect to the camera body, the mode is switched to the first operation mode by the mode switching means.

5. The electronic camera of a single-lens reflex type according to claim 1, further comprising a first judging means which judges whether a user is seeing through a finder, and a second judging means which judges whether the monitor is arranged at a normal position with respect to the camera body,

wherein when the first judging means judges that the user is not seeing through the finder, and the second judging means judges that the monitor is arranged at the normal position with respect to the camera body, the mode switching means switches the mode to the second operation mode.

6. The electronic camera of a single-lens reflex type according to claim 1, wherein the mode switching means includes a mode switching switch provided on the camera body, and the mode switching operation is performed based on an operation of the mode switching switch.

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